

Labour of Loss

An Examination of the Economic Effects of Discrimination in the Canadian Labour Market and Recommendations for the Labour Movement in the New Millennium

ABSTRACT

In examining the economic indicators for equity-seeking groups, it is apparent that workers are facing a set of differential labour experiences. Participation levels for most of the groups appear to be quite similar to the constant variable chosen for comparison. What is troublesome, however, is that despite reasonable participation levels, levels of unemployment, wages and earnings are consistently much lower. Combined with higher rates of unemployment and lower employment earnings are groups that continue to be segregated into jobs and occupations characterized by low pay, no benefits, insecurity and the rates of unionization. The full effect that is created is increased levels of poverty for members identifying with these groups. What is very important to note is that in most cases, a 'double-negative' effect emerged, where if workers identified with more than one equity seeking group, their levels of participation, unemployment and earnings were even lower.

These differences in the economic power of equity-seeking groups has often been "explained" by their differing personal characteristics such as education, language and age; when these characteristics are accounted for however, the results are much the same. Having said this, it can be inferred that those with all other things constant, workers from these equity-seeking groups are faced with labour discrimination, and have to cope with the effects as such.

The legislation and policies created to protect workers, by eliminating barriers to participation often work to perpetuate the difficulties faced by workers belonging to equity-seeking groups in their workplaces and within the labour market.

Taking into account the paper's findings, an action plan for the labour movement in the coming years has been developed. The seven step plan includes actions around the following:

- 1. Recognition and Awareness**
- 2. Organizing**
- 3. Legislative Lobbying**
- 4. Bargaining**
- 5. Education**
- 6. Campaigns**
- 7. Union Structures and Union Positions**

The steps outlined in this paper are broad, and do not limit the direction taken by the Alberta Federation of Labour in the coming years. The hope is that these steps will provide a blueprint for actions aimed at alleviating the differential economic outcomes for workers from equity-seeking groups; help to develop plans for increasing

INTRODUCTION

The labour force acts as a reflection of society. The labour market comes, in time, with the entry of different people, to represent a changing and evolving public. The Canadian labour market, in some ways, provides a sketch of modern Canadian culture and its communities. Women, visible minorities, immigrants, youth, seniors, gays, lesbians and disabled persons, coming to be fully recognized as contributing members of society, are active members within a growing working class. With this said, one must recognize that the cultural and societal inequalities experienced by these groups of people are mirrored in their labour experiences. By virtue of one's gender, colour, ability, sexual orientation or age, workplace and labour market barriers exist that provide a differential set of economic consequences of their employment. Labour discrimination results in wage gaps, decreased employment and occupational opportunities, decreased access to benefits and limited labour mobility — all of which gives workers faced with these realities, an economic disadvantage.

Workplace policies, government legislation, and a generally more tolerant and inclusive society has meant that on the surface, labour discrimination is not as prevalent as it once was. These same tools, used to eliminate Canadian labour inequalities, have in some way, come to shape, legislate and 'legalize' continued discriminatory treatment within workplaces, inequitable labour practices and forms of occupational segregation.

The Canadian labour movement has played a large role in bringing these equity issues into the public discourse and onto the bargaining table. The role for labour organizations in the new decade will be to continue the work started around equity issues, recognizing the economic effects of labour discrimination. It will also require recognition that traditional tools employed to minimize labour discrimination may not be effective in an ever-changing economy. The labour movement must take steps to incorporate policies and mandates, paired with bargaining and organizing tools, that will foster greater levels of equity and inclusion within the Canadian labour market.

LABOUR DISCRIMINATION

Discrimination is defined as, "adverse treatment based on some defining characteristic(s) of an individual, such as race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality or religion" (Albelda and others 1997,6). This definition can be expanded to include age, ability and socio-economic class. In doing so, one broadens the notion of discrimination to include the experiences of those belonging to the broadest possible subsection of what is considered to be "equity-seeking groups."

An understanding of discrimination in this broad form is required to develop a working definition of what is meant by "labour discrimination." For purposes of this paper, labour discrimination will be defined as, "adverse treatment in hiring, firing and treatment on the job" (Albelda and others 1997,6). This definition will be broadened to include the adverse treatment affecting access to certain jobs and occupations, difficulty in accessing benefits, and most generally, adverse treatment respecting the terms and conditions of employment.

DEVELOPING INDICATORS OF LABOUR DISCRIMINATION

Due to the relative lack of research done in the area around the economic effects of discrimination within Canadian labour markets, it is necessary to outline a group of indicators that will be used to determine whether or not labour discrimination may be a factor shaping an equity-seeking group's labour experience. Please note that these indicators should not be viewed as absolute determinants, but rather as broad markers from which to formulate a set of assumptions about whether or not discrimination is probably being experienced by each group examined. The indicators all, in some aspect, can also be extrapolated to mark levels of economic power and labour market integration.

The indicators used will be the following: labour force participation, unemployment, occupational composition and segregation, earnings, wage and wage differentials and dependence on social assistance.

1. Labour Force Participation

Labour force participation refers to the “rate at which is the proportion of the total population who are working or looking for work” (DeSilva 1992, 10). The participation rate for a particular group in the labor force is that group expressed as a percentage of the population for that group. These numbers include the civilian non-institutional population who are employed or unemployed (i.e. the labour force). This indicator acts as a measure of entry of workers into labour markets.

2. Unemployment

Unemployment rates reflect the number of unemployed persons expressed as a percentage of the labour force. Persons include those that do not have a job, but are available for work and are either on temporary layoff, have looked for work in the past four weeks or have a job to start in the next four weeks. Unemployment measures labour force activity. It also acts as an effective indicator of who is most affected during the times when the economy is performing poorly. In times of economic downturn, there is a noticeable trend, which most often results in higher levels of unemployment. Greater unemployment often translates into greater dependence on social assistance by workers who find themselves unemployed. Unemployment has also been linked to various other social problems, such as crime and conflict. Unemployment levels also show how well certain groups may be adjusting to labour markets, by indicating how quickly people are able to find jobs, and by showing how long or short frequencies of unemployment are.

3. Occupational Composition

In referring to occupational composition, one is describing the types of occupations groups are employed in. This indicator is used to examine which occupations certain groups of workers dominate, as well as those occupations and sectors where workers coming from these equity-seeking groups represent little or none of the employed workforce. Occupational composition can be simplified to look at the proportion of workers in occupations deemed to be ‘good jobs’ and those deemed to be ‘bad jobs.’ This indicator must also include a category looking at levels of self-employment, as it does

not usually appear in general occupational and sectoral classifications. For purposes of this paper, the occupational composition indicator will also look at the proportion of individuals in equity-seeking groups engaged in part-time, contract and seasonal employment — often referred to as “precarious” or non-standard employment.

4. Earnings

Earnings act as an indicator of economic power. Here, earnings reflect wages, salaries and net income, which includes any other sources of non-employment income, including benefits, social assistance, investment income earnings and non-taxable earnings. The amount one earns will affect several things — access to education, childcare and healthcare; forms of housing; levels of nutrition; number of jobs held; number of hours worked.

5. Wages and Wage Differentials

Wages are a measure of employment income only. They include hourly income, earnings from contract work and salaried income. Statistics on wages are obtained from taxable income information from workers and income statements from employers. For this indicator, it is not enough just to list average wages earned for each equity group, but rather to look at wage differentials. Simply put, to gain a clear understanding of what wages mean as an indicator, one must compare average wages between groups, and across occupations. The mean wage used for comparison for use in this paper, would be that of average Canadian males employed full-time in the labour force. Wages, like earnings, affect one's access to social goods, indicates levels of economic power, as well as affects the number of hours worked and the number of jobs held.

6. Dependence on Social Assistance Programs

Dependence on social assistance is an important aspect of economic performance. It acts as an indicator of economic adjustment to the labour market. High levels of dependence on social assistance programs may be interpreted to mean a problematic adjustment to the labour market — entry, exit and mobility of workers as labour participants. Dependence on social assistance affects

levels of participation within the economy due to programs aimed at providing only the most basic coverage. High levels of dependence, or dependence for long periods of time, may limit entry into traditional labour markets. This allows some to question the ability of workers to access wage labour if they belong to an equity-seeking group who are proportionately more likely to access social assistance.¹

7. Unionization

Levels of unionization will provide an indication of several things. Where workers are protected by a collective agreement, they are more likely to have higher pay and greater benefits. This “union wage premium” (Jackson 1999) promotes greater wage equality and better working conditions, by “compressing wage differentials” (Jackson 2000, 95). In 1998, 33.3% of Canadian workers were covered by a collective agreement (Jackson 2000, 97).

CHOOSING A ‘CONSTANT’ VARIABLE

In order to create a more complete understanding of what these economic indicators are revealing, a constant variable has been chosen as a means for comparison. For the purposes of this paper, the male averages of the economic indicators will be used as a constant.

The occupational sectors that male workers dominate are the goods/producing and manufacturing sectors, with 2,884,000 and 1,589,000 male workers employed in these sectors respectively in 1999. According to the 1996 Census, 829,700 male workers were employed in part-time employment. In the same Census year, 435,780 (incorporated) and 787,565 (unincorporated) males were self-employed in Canada.

EQUITY-SEEKING GROUPS

Women

Over the last fifty years women have entered the paid labour market, with levels of labour force participation

increasing in each decade. The factors “propelling women into the labour market... at an accelerated pace,” have been “economic need, social and individual attitudes and individual choice” (Phillips and Phillips 1993, 45). The current figures show that the female labour force and the corresponding participation rates are at levels within 13-15% of the same indicators for their male counterparts. It is thought that within the next decade, these rates will eventually mirror one another.

What is troubling however, is that despite these figures, the average earnings and wages of women still fall far below male workers. These figures remain relatively unchanged when adjusted for education, training, age and work experience.

To explain the low wage and earning levels of women, one must examine the types of jobs women are doing and the sectors in which women are the predominant workers. According to Armstrong and Armstrong (1994), “large numbers of women remain segregated in many of the least attractive and lowest-paid jobs” (Armstrong and Armstrong 1994, 19). In reality, increased participation levels have only meant that more women are doing the same types of jobs, in the same sectors.

Wage and earning differentials result from two things: the first being that women may be paid lower wages for the same or similar jobs as men, but also because “women

Table 1 Average Male (1998-2000)

Indicator	Figure(s)
Labour Force (2000)	8,649.2 (thousands)
Labour Force Participation (2000)	72.5%
Unemployment (2000)	6.9%
Earnings (1998)	\$34,171/yr (all workers)
Wage	1.00 (constant)
Dependence on Social Assistance Programs	N/A
Unionization (1998)	34.4%
Part-time Employment (2000)	829,700
Self Employment	1,223,345
<i>Source: Statistics Canada data</i>	

have been channeled into a number of low-wage job ghettos” (Phillips and Phillips 1993, 56). Armstrong and

Armstrong state that an obvious trend persists where, “women tend to work in the industries where labour productivity and pay are lower” (Armstrong and Armstrong 1994, 28). The occupational sector that Canadian female workers are predominantly employed in is the healthcare/social assistance sector, with 1,173,000 female workers in 1999. The argument can be made that jobs within this sector are generally those that tend to be labour intensive and in secondary industries, which have lower salaries (Armstrong and Armstrong 1994, 27).

According to the 1996 Census, 156,950 (incorporated) and 422,065 (unincorporated) females were self-employed in Canada.

The culminating effects of these labour market realities for women have resulted in the feminization of poverty. Female poverty has been linked “directly or indirectly to women’s inferior status in the labour market” (Phillips and Phillips 1993, 68). Female poverty can also be linked to the percentage of women who are dependent on some sort of social assistance program. Generally, higher proportions of women depend on some sort of government transfer or social assistance.

Table 2 Women	
Indicator	Figure(s)
Labour Force (2000)	7,350.0 (thousands)
Labour Force Participation (2000)	59.5%
Unemployment (2000)	6.7%
Earnings (1998)	\$21,999/yr (all workers)
Wage (2000)	0.644
Dependence on Social Assistance Programs	N/A
Unionization (1998)	32.0%
Part-time Employment (2000)	1,871,800
Self Employment	579,015
<i>Source: Statistics Canada data</i>	

Visible Minorities²

According to the latest Census, Canada’s vision of itself as a multiracial society has been actualized. With 3,197,480 Canadians identifying themselves as members of a visible minority, one would expect the landscape of the labour market to reflect the inclusion of these workers. According to the participation rates for members of visible minority groups, the inclusion of these workers into the Canadian

Occupational composition must also take into account whether or not workers are employed part-time or full-time. In 2000, 1,871,800 female workers were employed in part-time employment. This figure represents more than two times that of males in part-time employment. Part-time work becomes troublesome when workers are forced to choose part-time work because full-time work is not available. By offering only part-time employment, employers can avoid paying pensions or benefits, and can pay employees lower wages because part-time work is not often covered by collective agreements. Access to job security and upward job mobility are also lessened in part-time work. According to Phillips and Phillips, the “high percentage of part-time work are distinguishing characteristics of the expansion of female labour market opportunities” (Phillips and Phillips 1993, 48).

labour market is evident.

Having said this, however, one must realize that despite these participation levels, “visible minorities as a group suffer a 15% wage disadvantage and a 13% earnings disadvantage” (Hum and Simpson 1998, 2). It is when

Table 3 Visible Minorities	
Indicator	Figure(s)
Labour Force (2000)	N/A
Labour Force Participation (2000)	N/A
Unemployment (2000)	N/A
Earnings (SLID)	\$23,133/yr(all workers)
Wage (SLID)	0.85
Dependence on Social Assistance Programs	N/A
Unionization	N/A
Part-time Employment	N/A
Self Employment	N/A
<i>Source: Statistics Canada data & Survey of Labour and Income Dynamics Survey (1993 SLID)</i>	

looking at the earnings and wages for workers of colour that that “colour” itself, becomes a “discriminating factor in Canadian labour markets” (Hum and Simpson 1998, 2). A study conducted by Christofides and Swidinsky (1994) found that visible minorities face a wage gap of about \$2.00 per hour compared to their white counterparts.

It should be noted that earnings and wage differentials for minority workers are not the same across the different minority groups. In fact, there is a “discrimination effect of visible minority membership on wages for particular visible minority groups.” (Hum and Simpson 1998, 13; Benjamin and Baker 1995). According to Hum and Simpson (1998), Black Canadians received about 19% less than the non-minority constant; Indo-Pakistani Canadians receive about 13% less; Chinese Canadians receive about 12% less; Asian (non-Chinese) Canadians receive about 16% less. So, within the visible minority grouping itself, there exists a further economic disadvantage.

These wage and earnings gaps are often excused as a result of “cultural differences, language skills and education quality” (Pendakur and Pendakur 1996, 3). Most studies have shown, however, that the gaps persist when these variables are accounted for. This is evident when earnings of visible minorities born in Canada are examined. For example, Pendakur and Pendakur (1996) found that the mean earnings of visible minority men born in Canada were almost five thousand dollars less than that of white men born in Canada.

There are no available statistics on the proportion of workers of colour partaking in part-time work or those who are self-employed. Similarly, there are no available figures with respect to unionization levels for this group of workers.

Immigrants

A discussion around labour discrimination for visible minorities is difficult to separate from the same discussion for immigrant workers, since over 90% of visible minority people in Canada are immigrants (De Silva and Doherty

1996, 6). Most studies in the area do not attempt to separate the two groups because of this. Immigrant workers, as members of a visible minority or not, face barriers that their white, Canadian-born, counterparts do not face.

Participation rates for immigrant workers are only marginally lower than native-born workers. In some cases, participation rates for immigrants have been higher than for their native-born counterparts. Often times, these initially lower participation rates for immigrants will rise as the length of residence increases. Participation levels are related to something that has been referred to as the “assimilation effect,” which looks at rates of labour integration as linked to the amount of time an immigrant has spent in the receiving country.

Unemployment rates may also be tied to this ‘settling in’ period. One may expect that levels of unemployment to be higher for newer immigrants than for older immigrants. One would need to look at trends across several different censuses to do this. At this time, such information is unavailable. Some people may link higher unemployment rates for immigrants to “less education, less experience, and less proficiency” (De Silva 1992, 13). Of the most

Table 4 Immigrants

Indicator	Figure(s)
Labour Force (2000)	N/A
Labour Force Participation (2000)	N/A
Unemployment (2000)	N/A
Earnings (SLID)	N/A
Wage (SLID)	N/A
Dependence on Social Assistance Programs	N/A
Unionization	N/A
Part-time Employment	N/A
Self Employment	N/A

recent and applicable studies, the unemployment levels of immigrants reflect more short-term lapses in employment, than long unemployment durations.

In a way, visible minority immigrants face a “double-negative” effect with respect to wage and earnings discrimination in the Canadian labour market. Pendakur and Pendakur (1996) found that “white male (immigrants) have higher average earnings than Canadian born white

males, while visible minority male immigrants have substantially lower average earnings than other immigrants or the Canadian born” (Pendakur and Pendaku 1996, 7) in their study. Further, they showed that visible minority immigrants had mean earnings seven thousand dollars lower than Canadian-born workers.

Participation rates, unemployment levels and wage and earnings differentials can, by themselves, demonstrate the levels of labour market integration and economic power immigrants have. These things can be understood more completely, however, when one examines the type of jobs, occupations and sectors immigrant Canadians are predominately found. There are generally more immigrants found in the service, processing and fabricating occupations relative to native-born Canadians. Many of these immigrants fail to occupy managerial jobs. The result is a large proportion of ‘dead-end’ jobs being occupied by new and older immigrants to the country. These jobs are, again, low wage, with little or no benefits, and limited access to training. These jobs have very little chance of being organized by unions.

In large part, the occupational composition of immigrants is a direct result of foreign accreditation and training going unrecognized by Canadian professional and trades sectors. The non-recognition of degrees and certificates earned in an immigrant’s native country denies immigrant access to professional sectors and trades once in Canada. Education goes unrecognized, and what is created is a mismatch of skills and education (De Silva 1992, 15). Highly educated

individuals are unable to use these foreign-learned skills in the Canadian labour market, which “leads to underemployment and reduced income” (Brouwer 1999, 5).

Immigrants to Canada are clearly faced with an unlevel playing field upon entry into Canadian labour markets. Due to differences in skin colour, language, or education, “immigrants may face a partial loss of human capital on entry” (Pendakur and Pendakur 1996, 5). These differences are used as excuses for denying qualified immigrant workers access to occupations, which they are qualified. Instead, these workers are channeled into jobs and occupations where they are over-skilled and over-educated, and substantially underpaid. This impacts immigrants who “find themselves shut out of their occupations...feel(ing) individually and collectively alienated, victims of institutional discrimination” (Brouwer 1999, 5).

Aboriginal Peoples

According to the latest census, there were 799,010 aboriginal people in Canada.³ The number of people of working age who identify themselves as aboriginal people is increasing at a fast pace, which reflects a “younger age structure” (Mendelson and Battle 1999, 1) existing within the Canadian aboriginal population. Aboriginal peoples are also considered to be a geographically and culturally heterogeneous group, with many people of aboriginal ancestry found in urban centres rather than on reserves. The movement from reserves to cities has not altered the labour experiences of this relatively young pool of workers, who still face a set of labour market prospects “much worse than for other Canadians” (Mendelson and Battle 1999, 1).

On the surface, it would appear that aboriginal workers are experiencing difficulties in entering into employment relationships. This figure, however, may be related to the “youthful” characteristic of the aboriginal working population. These rates are even more surprising given the high unemployment rates for aboriginals, which generally would have pushed participation rates to low levels due to an increase in the number of ‘discouraged workers’⁴ within the labour force.

Table 5 Aboriginal Peoples

Indicator	Figure(s)
Labour Force (2000)	N/A
Labour Force Participation (1996)	58.7%
Employment (1996)	44.0%
Unemployment (1996)	24.5%
Earnings (1996)	\$14,883/yr
Wage	N/A
Dependence on Social Assistance Programs	19.1% of earnings
– See comments	
Unionization	N/A
Part-time Employment	N/A
Self Employment	N/A
<i>Source: Statistics Canada data</i>	

One of the most striking differences between aboriginal workers and the constant variable developed in this paper, is level of unemployment. According to the figures, the unemployment rate for an aboriginal person was over three and one-half (3.6 more) times the rate of unemployment for the average worker constant. This unemployment gap has widened due to the fact that the "labour market conditions for Aboriginals have actually deteriorated relative to economic conditions generally" (Mendelson and Battle 1999, 2). These levels reflect the difficulties faced by aboriginal workers in remaining active, paid labour participants. The average duration of unemployment periods for aboriginal workers is generally longer, and at higher frequencies. This could undoubtedly be linked to increased levels of dependency on social assistance programs, including Employment Insurance benefits and welfare.

When aboriginal people are involved in paid labour, they reap lower economic rewards. According to these figures, average male workers make 1.3 times the yearly earnings of aboriginal workers, representing a 56.4% earnings gap between the two groups. Pendakur and Pendakur (1996) found that aboriginal workers earn less than white workers or workers of visible minorities in Canada. Kuhn (1994) found that some of the gap can be "explained" by differences in observable characteristics, primarily education. This earnings gap "may also be attributable to the fact that Aboriginal workers (aged 18-64) are on average, three years younger than the Canadian labour force as a whole" (Bernier 1997, 3). This gap results in Aboriginal workers having less economic power, and then many having to depend on outside sources of non-employment income (i.e. federal payments, social assistance, royalties, etc.) to supplement low income earnings. Figures examined in 1991, showed that aboriginals living on reserves had 19.1% of their total yearly earnings coming from governmental transfers (i.e. family allowances, child tax credits, OAS, CPP, EI) (Bernier 1997, 12). This affects their access to adequate levels of education, healthcare and housing.

The low earnings of aboriginal workers can, in part, be linked to the types of jobs and sectors Aboriginal persons dominate. In a study conducted by Rachel Brenier (1997), there were "fewer professionals, managers and technicians among Aboriginal workers, but slightly more workers in the services and blue collar sectors" (Bernier 1997, 5). Many jobs in these sectors are part-time, less specialized

and lower paid; they provide less security, less opportunities and little or no training. Aboriginal workers, become, in some way stuck within these job ghettos.

Examination of these figures show that Aboriginal people are facing difficulties in becoming part of the labour force, they are having a hard time finding jobs and keeping them, they are being paid lower wages and are earning less. On average, Aboriginal peoples are not faced with an equal set of opportunities or economic outcomes as other Canadian workers. These labour realities relate to the historic social problems Aboriginal Canadians have and continue to face. All too often, these problems have been "explained" by aboriginals' education and skill levels or lack of aboriginal labour commitment. In reality, these "explanations" do nothing but attempt to validate the labour discrimination faced by this group of workers, by ignoring economic figures that imply that discrimination may be the only plausible reason.

Disabled

Not until recently have disabled workers been fully recognized in the Canadian labour market. Much of this has to do with the shift in thinking that has occurred in Canada since the 1970s. This shift has involved changing attitudes about disabilities, how disabilities are defined, and how persons with disabilities are understood. Since the coming of the Canadian *Charter of Rights and Freedoms*, there has been recognition of the "place and role of persons with disabilities in society" (Bunch and Crawford 1998, 10). What has developed is a movement to remove barriers and disincentives for persons with disabilities, including within the labour market, to enable full participation.

Participation levels of persons with disabilities cannot be expressed as a single figure. Instead, severity of disability must be accounted for when examining levels of labour market participation. The severity of disability has a direct impact on labour force participation. According to Bunch and Crawford, "the more severe a person's impairment, the less likely they are to be employed" (Bunch and Crawford 1998, 33). Participation rates are 70.9%, 44.8% and 25.6% for persons with mild, moderate and severe disabilities respectively. Participation levels have also been linked to the cause of disability, with people who are injured on the job to be most likely to remain labour force participants (64.7%) (Bunch and Crawford

1998, 34). In addition, as people with disabilities become older, they are less likely to participate in the labour market (Bunch and Crawford 1998, 39).

An interesting trend not observed with the other equity-seeking groups, is the effect of educational attainment on employment experiences. For persons with disabilities, the “higher the educational attainment . . . the more likely they are to be employed” (Bunch and Crawford 1998, 43). The gap for labour force participation persists when education is accounted for, however, the gap narrows more steadily as the level of education increases for this group of workers.

Levels of education have also been related to the chances of a person with a disability experiencing discrimination in the hiring process. A study conducted by the Roeher Institute in 1992 reported that few people with a university degree had been refused a job because of their disability. Conversely, 32.7% of those with a grade five education or less reported being refused employment because of their disability. One could infer that in some cases, levels of educational attainment balance labour discrimination for persons with disabilities. What this conclusion fails to take into account is the possible barriers faced by persons with disabilities to entering post-secondary education. If the number of disabled persons with university degrees is low, the effect of education on hiring becomes less meaningful in real terms.

Despite these levels of labour participation, people with disabilities are twice as likely as others to have no employment income at all. 54.8% of persons with disabilities had no employment income; 12.1% earning less than \$5,000; 6.4% earning between \$5,000 and \$10,000; 11.1% earning between \$10,000 and \$20,000; 8.0% earning between \$20,000 and \$30,000; and only 7.6% earning over \$30,000 (Bunch and Crawford 1998, 36). When earnings and wages are examined, persons with disabilities earn wages that are \$1300 less than those without any impairments (Bunch and Crawford 1998, 35).

Disabled women are further disadvantaged, making on average, \$2,000 less than those of other women and men are with disabilities. This results in a wage gap of 37% between disabled men and women. It can be concluded that there exists a double-negative effect of employment for women with any sort of impairment. Lower incomes and wages create a cycle of poverty for those with disabilities. This cycle includes low incomes, lack of resources for education, training and retraining, and poor health and unemployment (Bunch and Crawford 1998, 37). It makes it more difficult to secure employment, resulting in higher levels of dependence on

Indicator	Figure(s)
Labour Force	N/A
Labour Force Participation	25.5% - 70.9%
Employment	18.5% - 62.1%
Unemployment	7.2% - 8.8%
Earnings	See comments
Wage	See comments
Dependence on Social Assistance Programs	N/A
Unionization	N/A
Part-time Employment	N/A
Self Employment	N/A

Source: Human Resources and Development – Applied Research Branch (1998)

social assistance programs.

People with disabilities are more likely to work in certain occupations than others. According to Bunch and Crawford (1998), persons with disabilities are found predominantly in the agricultural, service and clerical occupations, with very few people with disabilities occupying jobs in the managerial and professional sectors (Bunch and Crawford 1998, 45). The service and clerical sectors are most “vulnerable to labour market changes” (Bunch and Crawford 1998, 45), which has resulted in many disabled persons being found in non-standard employment. People with disabilities are working in occupations now dominated by casual work, contract work, and part-time work. As such, they have limited job security, limited benefits, and lower earnings. Downsizing in these sectors has also impacted these workers, who now find themselves unemployed and underemployed. Labour discrimination for people with disabilities also fall

along occupation lines; Canadian Human Rights Commission files show that “unemployed semi-professional and semi-skilled workers with disabilities are more than twice as likely to be refused jobs because of their disability than job seekers in general” (Bunch and Crawford 1998, 58).

Despite this changing shift in the attitudes and understanding of disabilities, people with disabilities are faced with a differential set of employment challenges. Entry into the labour market, as based on levels of participation, depends upon severity of impairment, with real earnings being far lower than for non-disabled counterparts across all impairment extremes. Disabled

Participation rates for those over the age of 65 are 45.2% less than those aged 55 to 64, which demonstrates that many Canadians are leaving the labour market as soon as they turn 65 years old (Statistics Canada 2000). This very low participation rate is then understandable, as is the relatively low rate of unemployment. Since fewer people are actually active in the labour force, the ratio of employed to unemployed workers also decreases.

With few seniors still earning wages, many must rely on pensions, old age security and social assistance for their income. On average, seniors rely on Old Age Security and the Guaranteed Income Supplement for up to 30% of their income (Alberta Community Development 2000,

18). What is interesting is that there is a large gap between the male and female earnings of seniors. This difference accounts for more than a 53% earnings differential. There is no available information regarding the gender breakdown of senior workers to see if this gap exists for wages earned.

Of those seniors still employed, most were employed in the agricultural sector. Many seniors, however, are involved in non-standard work, of

persons, without university education, face barriers to entry, often resulting in greater chances of becoming ‘stuck’ in semi-skilled occupations, with a higher susceptibility to changes in the economy. Women with disabilities are faced with a double-negative employment reality, due to a marked and persistent earnings gap. All of this culminates into increased chances for people with disabilities to enter into cycles of poverty and dependence on social assistance programs.

Seniors

The Canadian labour force has been said to be going through a ‘graying.’ With a dwindling federal pension plan, many workers have remained active labour market participants beyond once-thought-normal, retirement ages. For purposes of this paper, a senior is considered to be any person over 65 years of age.

which, most is unpaid. Seniors demonstrate very high levels of volunteerism, with 23% of Canadian seniors involved in formal volunteer work and 64% involved in informal volunteer work. Further, 25% of seniors provided unpaid care or assistance to other seniors. Despite the fact that volunteering is not recognized within the labour market, much of the work that is completed by volunteers could, or at one time was, being done by paid labour. Their labour contribution is not being formally acknowledged with earnings, however, the impact such work has is far-reaching and important to a healthy economy.

Low levels of employment and labour force participation allow seniors the time to partake in unpaid labour such as volunteering. As such, they remain contributing participants within the labour market, however are unable

Indicator	Figure(s)
Labour Force (2000)	N/A
Labour Force Participation (2000)	6.0%
Unemployment (2000)	2.7%
Earnings (1998)	\$35,510/yr (male), \$16,587/yr (female)
Wage	N/A
Dependence on Social Assistance Programs	10%, Up to 30% of income
Unionization	N/A
Part-time Employment	N/A
Self-Employment	N/A

Source: Statistics Canada data & “Alberta for All Ages” (2000)

to actualize any monetary benefits from doing so. Seniors display marketably high levels of dependence on social assistance and pension programs. One could contend that seniors are unable to remain or enter into the conventional paid labour market, whether this is due to age or skills, one cannot be certain.

Youth

There are four million youth between 15 and 24 years old in Canada, which makes up for one-fifth of the population of 15 to 64 year olds. In the last decade, the number of youth has increased by 2.9%. Labour experiences of young people are much different than their older counterparts. Workers who fall under the “youth” moniker are often balancing work and school; patterns and length of employment reflect this ‘balancing act.’

Indicator	Figure(s)
Labour Force (2000)	N/A
Labour Force Participation (2000)	64.4%
Employment (2000)	55.7%
Unemployment (2000)	11.8%
Earnings	N/A
Wage	N/A
Dependence on Social Assistance Programs	N/A
Unionization Rate	11%
Part-time Employment	44.6%
Self Employment (1999)	267,000 or 6.9% of youth

Source: Statistics Canada & “Profile of Canadian Youth in the Labour Market” (2000)

Participation rates for young workers has showed marked decline from 1990 to 1996, and has been attributed, in part, to “cyclically weak employment” (HRDC Canada 2000, 16). This refers to the levels of attachment to the labour market displayed by students, who find it difficult to find work while continuing school (HRDC Canada 2000, 16). There were, however, some youth who were neither employed nor students. For this group, they tend to be the least educated and the least skilled, and would have limited opportunities in the labour market, so they remain non-participants.

The seemingly high rate of youth unemployment in comparison to the male constant can be explained in terms of the ‘incidence’ and ‘duration’ of unemployment periods. That is, how often and how long periods of unemployment are. Youth have a “greater likelihood of becoming unemployed (incidence) rather than the usually long period required to find a job (duration)” (Lavoie and Bejaoui 1998, 11). Simply, young workers are more likely to experience short-term unemployment, but at higher incident rates. Gunderson et al (1998) attribute some of this to ‘frictional unemployment,’ which relates to higher turnover rates for young people trying to “find a job that matches their qualifications and skills” (Lavoie and Bejaoui 1998, 11).

Half of the young working population is employed in “wholesale or retail trade, food services and accommodation sectors: the Gap, Taco Bell, and Holiday Inn jobs of the Canadian economy” (Laxer 1999, 34). The workplaces in these sectors are generally small, with 34% of workers being employed in workplaces with between 20 and 99 employees. The likelihood of unionizing these sectors and these workplaces is astonishingly low, with only a 15% chance of these work places being protected by a collective agreement (Laxer 1999, 35).

Part-time hours and minimum wages characterize the retail and food service sectors. Youth are found predominately in this part-time employment, because “many high school and post-secondary students work” (HRDC Canada 2000, 19). These jobs tend to have entry level wages, little or no benefits, and fewer opportunities for upward mobility. Despite the lower earnings and in security, there has been an increase in part-time employment in the last decade. Part of this has been attributed to the increase in school enrollment.

An interesting feature of part-time work is that is can be voluntary or involuntary. Involuntary part-time work is a measure of underemployment (HRDC Canada 2000, 19). In the last 25 years, the share of involuntary part-time work has more than doubled. For those youth not attending school, “more than half were working part-time involuntarily” (HRDC Canada 2000, 19).

A large and growing percentage of youth are engaged in self-employment. This trend can be attributed, in part, to the inability of young workers to find suitable paid employment (HRDC Canada 2000, 23). Self-employment leaves these workers in a precarious position, in that they will have little access to benefits and training opportunities. Almost all of youth self-employment remains in the service sector, and earnings tend to be lower than in paid employment in this sector.

The summation of these economic indicators implies that young people are having difficulty entering well-paid sectors or full-time employment relationships. As a result, youth have a tendency to hold non-standard jobs (part-time, short-term contracts and self employment), which incur low real earnings, less access to training and benefits, and little or no job security. It is not for lack of formal education that young workers are suffering. Instead, it seems to be a matter of increased competition with adults with more on-the-job experience and seniority. As such, young workers find themselves unable to tap into an echelon of 'good' jobs for which their older counterparts have a somewhat guarded access.

Gay, Lesbian, Bi-sexual & Transgendered

Economic indicators are not available for gay, lesbian, bi-sexual and transgendered members of the Canadian population. Sexual orientation is not an identifier used or collected by Statistics Canada for the purposes of reporting on working populations. Due to this, one can only discuss issues that are faced by this equity group in the labour market and workplaces.

A recent case in Alberta has brought attention to the discrimination some members of the GLBT community face in their workplaces. Delwin Vriend, an instructor at a Christian post-secondary institute in Edmonton was terminated on the basis of sexual orientation.

Mr. Vriend fought the termination, by taking the case to the Supreme Court. In light of the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms*, Mr. Vriend's employer was found at fault, as was the Alberta Government for not having a provision around sexual orientation in the provincial human rights legislation. Protection from discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation is still not in Alberta's *Human Rights, Multiculturalism and Citizenship Act*.

Another labour issue faced by gay, lesbian, bi-sexual and transgendered workers is access to benefits. Since there is limited progressive legislation regarding same-sex partnerships, there are limits to the levels of access to same-sex benefits for these workers. This represents a clear case of labour discrimination. In some benefit plans, benefits can be shared amongst same-sex partners. Where wording does not exist however, employees are denied benefits, and without the appropriate provincial human rights legislation to fall back on, still remain unable to access the benefits.

Since "sexual orientation" refers to "whether a person is attracted to men, women or both" (Canadian Labour Congress 2000, 3), workers from this community cannot necessarily be identified as gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgendered, and may not face labour discrimination in hiring, mobility, earnings, or occupational composition. The labour discrimination they do face, however subtle, does impart a set of negative consequences for these workers. With still limited understanding and awareness, with variances in the protective legislation available, workers in this community are faced with, as difficult a struggle as workers in the other equity-seeking groups examined.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

In examining the economic indicators for equity-seeking groups, it is apparent that workers are facing a set of differential labour experiences. Participation levels for most of the groups appear to be quite similar to the constant variable chosen for comparison. What is troublesome, however, is that despite reasonable participation levels, levels of unemployment, wages and earnings are consistently much lower. Combined with higher rates of unemployment and lower employment earnings are groups that continue to be segregated into jobs and occupations characterized by low pay, no benefits, insecurity and the low rates of unionization. The full effect that is created is increased levels of poverty for members identifying with these groups. What is very important to note, that in most cases, a 'double-negative' effect emerged where, if workers identified with more than one equity seeking-group, their levels of participation, unemployment and earnings were even lower.

These differences in the economic power of equity-seeking groups has often been "explained" by their differing personal characteristics such as education, language and

age; when these characteristics are accounted for however, the results are much the same. Having said this, it can be inferred, those with all other things constant, workers from these equity-seeking groups are faced with labour discrimination, and have to cope with the affects as such.

WORKPLACE POLICIES AND GOVERNMENT LEGISLATION

In the past 30 years, employers and governments have become more cognizant of the implications that discrimination and labour discrimination have on workers and on economies. As such, many practices, policies and legislation have been established to break down barriers to participation in labour markets, to include workers from groups not traditionally entering the labour force and to improve the representation of equity-seeking groups in certain jobs and occupations. Many of these policies and laws have been erected, and then modified, to fit in with an emerging rights-based consciousness. All have generally been promoted under the guise of being able to increase equality and equity for working people. Granted, many of these practices and laws have improved the state of the working class, but there are ways in which some policies have, at the same time, served to legislate and legalize various forms of labour discrimination.

Non-Harassment Policies

Many employers have adopted some sort of non-harassment policy for their workplaces. Many include 'vision statements' or mandates. Others may include enforcement provisions where there are consequences should there be incidences of labour discrimination. These policies are only effective when they are matched with an understanding of exactly what discrimination entails, involves employers and employees who are committed to preserving a safe and equitable environment, and includes an enforcement mechanism for handling complaints that is used when workers rights are being violated.

Affirmative Action Hiring Policies

Despite general positive effects and outcomes, these policies can create jobs/positions that take on an air of 'tokenism.' Rather than incorporating policies based solely on equity, employers may fulfil quotas for the sake of fulfilling quotas, instead of undertaking meaningful changes in hiring and promotion. Employees entering

into affirmative action positions may come to feel isolated due to treatment by fellow workers who may perceive them to be 'second class employees,' hired only to fulfill some requirement or quota, instead of being hired based on their education, experience and merit.

Charter of Rights and Freedoms

Discrimination laws have not been enacted for such a broad and general purpose as they have been used. Rather, they have been enacted to rectify long histories of discrimination against certain groups in society. There is a greater need to understand the basis of discrimination in order to enact useful laws that address these broad issues. The *Charter of Rights and Freedoms* does, for the most part, protect workers from clear instances of discrimination. The difficulty in this, however, is that the *Charter* remains primarily a 'complaints-based' document, where specific cases are dealt with, and little work is done to eliminate systemic and enduring cases of discrimination. Another difficulty is that provincial human rights legislation varies, in some cases quite dramatically, from the *Charter*, which leaves some workers without protection against discrimination.

Labour Laws and Employment Standards

Current labour legislation places restrictions on certification, which minimizes the chances unions can organize sectors dominated by equity-seeking groups. Grievance procedures are often times confusing, lengthy and costly, which call into question this mechanism's true accessibility. Grievance procedures are only available to those workers who are protected by a collective agreement, so unorganized workers have only employment standards legislation to look to for protection.

Employment standards vary across provincial jurisdictions, and set forth the absolute minimum or 'floor' of protection available to workers.

Pay Equity

Due to high profile cases in the public sector, where female-dominated positions were most affected by pay equity laws, pay equity has been seen as a "women's issue." In fact, pay equity is a broad equity-enhancing policy, which if enforced and implemented correctly, could mean substantial changes for many workers and

workplaces. The current problems with pay equity lies in the differences in legislation across the provincial jurisdictions. Many provinces have implemented progressive legislation in the area, however, many provinces have only some form of equal pay legislation, which places little or no “value” on work. Even in the jurisdictions with pay equity legislation, the legislation applies only to certain sectors, in workplaces with a certain number of workers. Since many workers from equity-seeking groups are found in the private sector, and often in small workplaces, they are not protected by such legislation.

Employment Equity

In theory, this type of legislation is effective in eliminating labour discrimination in the areas of hiring and promotion. The legislation, however, is only strong if it is enforced. Given that across jurisdictions, the majority of complaints made to provincial human rights commissions are related to employment equity, it appears that the legislation finds it's only enforcement in reacting to, and not preventing, complaints. In a complaints-based enforcement mechanism like this, only those workers who are experiencing discrimination and file a complaint will see any improvement. Those workers who do not, will remain discriminated against. Other problems with employment equity legislation lie in the fact that in most jurisdictions, it does not apply to the private sector, which adversely affects many workers from equity-seeking groups. In Canada, only 12% of workers are protected by the federal *Employment Equity Act (1996)*.

Immigration Act

Immigrants entering Canada are faced with an application process that, in itself, channels immigrant workers into semi-skilled, low-wage job ghettos. Currently, immigration is awarded based on a federal “point system.” Immigrants must achieve at least 70 points in categories including occupation, education, training, experience, age and knowledge of English and French. This is based on the government's expectation that all successful immigrants should have skills, education, work experience and language in order to “participate in the labour market.”⁵ These categories, and the respective allocation of points, are in themselves, discriminatory. In the age category, the most points are given to workers between

the ages of 21-44; for education, only those with completed university degrees can qualify for full points; for training, the most points are given to professional training and the least for technical training; in occupations, applicants are only awarded high points for professional occupations or those on a Canadian list of desired jobs; immigrants “with difficulty” in English or French face earning no points; a suitability category awards up to 10 points for “adaptability, motivation and initiative.”

Even if immigrants are granted immigration, these workers are faced with difficulties in gaining employment in occupations for which they are trained because of non-recognition of foreign accreditation. So, despite, needing to demonstrate high levels of education, and experience in professional fields, many immigrants, upon entry must seek work in areas in which they are over-educated and over-skilled. The points system places great importance on skills, abilities and education, yet does little to ensure that these do not go to waste once immigrants are active in the Canadian labour market. Because of accreditation barriers, employers are essentially able to refuse hiring immigrant workers in positions and in sectors that provide full-time work and living wages.

HRDC Work Programs

Human Resources Development Canada cites that its mission is to “enable Canadians to participate fully in the workplace and community.”⁶ To achieve this, the department undertakes an “integrated approach to human development,” that stresses affordability, self-reliance, and adaptability. Many of the retraining programs, job search advice, and work-transition initiatives place the onus on individuals to adjust to changing labour realities by “investing in themselves.” There is very little mention of the possible systemic barriers workers from equity-groups may face when entering or re-entering the labour force. The programs aimed at “reducing the barriers for those people with special needs,” are often times side-lining these workers into jobs and occupations typified by low ages and precarious employment. Workers are advised to take “preventative measures,” to reduce the risk of job loss by “making better choices.” Despite being committed, in principle, to equitable participation, safe and fair workplaces, and access to jobs and occupations by all individuals, the manner in which Human Resources and Development Canada does little to effectively achieve these goals.

WHAT THE LABOUR MOVEMENT SHOULD BE DOING

The labour movement has been instrumental in ensuring social justice issues are part of social, economic and political discourse. Plans of action like those contained in the Canadian Labour Congress' "Challenging Racism: Going Beyond Recommendations" (1997) has addressed issues of discrimination in the labour movement, in workplaces and in communities. It is important to continue to adopt and implement actions like these that increase awareness around workplace equality and equity. This paper is meant to serve as a 'next step,' in actualizing some of these goals. By providing a sketch of the labour experiences of equity-seeking groups, and by tracing and linking their differential economic conditions to labour discrimination, gives the labour movement another vantage point from which to strategize actions for continued and effective change.

Step One Recognition and Awareness

The first step must be recognition on the part of labour that discrimination persists in labour markets and workplaces despite programs, policies and legislation meant to increase the participation and equality of equity-seeking workers. This recognition must be paired with an awareness that by virtue of one's gender, colour, origin, ability, sexual orientation or age, that some workers continue to have less opportunities and less economic power.

Step Two Organizing

The second step for labour is to continue to organize workplaces and sectors dominated by workers from equity-seeking groups. This includes organizing workplaces that employ, in large proportion, part-time, casual and contract labour. Organizing should also focus on the service and retail sectors of the economy, which are the fastest growing sectors, while at the same time the least unionized, where workers from equity-seeking groups are clustered.

Step Three Legislative Lobbying

The labour movement must commit itself to continue lobbying all levels of government for changes to laws

that legalize and perpetuate discrimination in workplaces and in the Canadian labour market. Unions should lobby for stronger language in the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms* and provincial human rights legislation that creates an understanding of what discrimination is and why equality provisions protect all Canadians. Lobbying around pay equity and employment equity laws need to continue so that both pieces of legislation are enforced and apply to all workers, across all sectors, in each jurisdiction equitably. Labour needs to continue to fight for labour laws that protect workers, and that set out certification processes that allow workplaces dominated by members of equity-seeking groups to be organized. Lobbying government to increase minimum wages must also be part of this effort to ensure sectors dominated by workers from equity-seeking groups are earning a comparable 'living wage.' Changes to the Immigration Act should be lobbied for, and paired with the lobbying of professional and trades accreditation for increased recognition of foreign-earned diplomas, certificates and degrees. Labour needs to also take a role in lobbying for more effective human resources and development programs that effectively match education and skills, that eliminates the creation of "job ghettos" and ensures that workers are prepared to enter ever-changing labour markets. Lobbying needs to continue to demand accessible, affordable and quality education and training.

Step Four Bargaining

Equity issues must continue to be included in the bargaining process and negotiated into collective agreements. Model contract language around pay equity, employment equity, non-harassment, training and recruitment provisions should be developed to ensure these issues are addressed in contracts that protect various workers, across various sectors.

Step Five Education

The labour movement must continue to endeavor to integrate non-harassment and non-discrimination components into all levels of union education. All workshops and courses should be written and presented using an integrated analysis — an analysis and perspective which is worker-centered, feminist, anti-racist and gay-positive. Workers attending union educationals should also be reflective of the workforce; inclusion in labour markets needs to be mirrored in union activities.

Step Six Campaigns

A set of campaigns aimed at improving the labour experiences of workers belonging to equity-seeking groups should be implemented at all levels within the labour movement. Some examples of possible campaigns are:

- “Bargaining Equality” – campaign around model contract language.
- “Our Rights: Our Laws” – labour law campaign.
- “There’s a Hole in My Pay Cheque and a Glass Ceiling in my Workplace” – pay and employment equity campaign.
- “Diversity and Solidarity” – promoting awareness around racism and discrimination in the labour movement.
- “Young, Organized and I Know My Rights” – youth campaign aimed at young workers in non-unionized workplaces and sectors.
- “Recognize This – Recognize ME” – campaign around non-recognition of foreign-earned degrees and diplomas.
- “W (here) A (re) G (ood) E (arnings)?” – campaign around increases to minimum wages.
- “It Makes Cents” – campaign for accessible and affordable education and training.

Step Seven Union Structure and Union Positions

In order for the labour movement to be progressive in addressing equality issues in the labour market and in workplaces, the movement itself needs to lead by example. At all levels in the labour movement, workers who are members of equity-seeking groups should be represented. By ensuring workers from equity-seeking groups are taking on leadership roles in locals, in unions and in central labour bodies, the decision-making, bargaining, education and organizing of the labour movement will become more effective and more democratic.

CONCLUSION

The steps outlined in this paper are meant to be broad, so as not to limit the direction taken by the Alberta

Federation of Labour in the coming years. The hope is that these steps will provide a blueprint for actions aimed at alleviating the differential economic outcomes for workers from equity-seeking groups; help to develop plans for increasing solidarity amongst all workers in the labour movement; and to assist in defining a new role for unions in a changing labour environment.

Endnotes:

¹ In 1998, there were 2,577,500 Canadians receiving some form of social assistance (Canadian Council on Social Development 1998).

² Under Employment Equity legislation, a person is defined as a member of a visible minority if non-aboriginal, or non-Caucasian in race and non-white in colour. This variable is defined through a combination of ethnic origin, place of birth and mother tongue. Simply, people who are non-aboriginal and non-European in ancestral origin (Pendakur and Pendakur 1996, 4).

³ According to the 1996 Census, there were 488,040 registered under the *Indian Act*. Of those, 227,285 were living on reserves and 260,755 were living off reserves.

⁴ Group of workers who are unable to find or secure adequate employment. Long durations and high frequencies of periods of unemployment mark these populations.

⁵ Citizenship and Immigration Canada found at <http://www.cic.gc.ca>

⁶ <http://www.hrdc-drhc.gc.ca> (March 20, 2001)

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